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## OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN, 1915

by

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**Captain U. S. Navy**

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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Security Classification This Page

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: <u>Unclassified</u>	
2. Security Classification Authority:	
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:	
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: <u>DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED</u>	
5. Name of Performing Organization: <u>Joint Military Operations Department</u>	
6. Office Symbol: <u>1C</u>	7. Address: <u>Naval War College, 686 Cushing Rd., Newport, RI 02841-5010</u>
8. Title (Include Security Classification): <u>OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN, 1915 (v)</u>	
9. Personal Authors: <u>CAPT L.C. Mason, USA</u>	
10. Type of Report: <u>Final</u>	11. Date of Report: <u>16 May 1994</u>
12. Page Count: <u>23</u>	
13. Supplementary Notation: <u>A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.</u>	
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: <u>Operational aspects of the Dardanelles campaign from the perspective of the operational commander.</u>	
15. Abstract: <u>An operational analysis of the Dardanelles campaign during World War I from the perspective of the operational commander. The Dardanelles campaign had the potential to offer an alternative to the war of attrition on the Western Front and significantly expedite the war's ending. The causes of the campaign's ultimate failure are many and the literature analyzing the failure is equally extensive. In the interest of brevity, the Navy only portion of the Dardanelles/Gallipoli campaign is explored, from the outbreak of the war in August 1914 to the end of the naval operation in March 1915. Four main factors influenced the outcome of the campaign: political expediency, poor planning, weak political leadership and weak military leadership. The operational commander could have leveraged the negative aspects of each of these factors and increased the opportunity for success in the Dardanelles. Despite volumes of expert analyses of the Dardanelles with accompanying lists of lessons learned, similar errors were repeated in the next World War and have continued to resurface in modern day regional conflicts and crises. The significance of the lessons learned from the Dardanelles are applied to a hypothetical military operation in the Arabian Gulf. This analogy is used to more clearly outline what the operational commander can do to prevent or diffuse the errors of leaders at the strategic level.</u>	
16. Distribution/Availability of Abstract: <u>Unclassified/Unlimited</u> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same As Rpt <u>DTIC Users</u>	
18. Abstract Security Classification: <u>Unclassified</u>	
19. Name of Responsible Individual: <u>Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department</u>	
20. Telephone: <u>(401) 841-3414/4120</u>	21. Office Symbol: <u>1C</u>

Security Classification of This Page Unclassified

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DTIC	TAB <input checked="checked" type="checkbox"/>
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A-1	

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# OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN, 1915

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Problem. B. H. Liddell Hart, noted for his original contributions to military theory and the conduct of war, claimed that the Dardanelles campaign was a "sound and far-sighted conception, marred by errors in execution almost unrivaled even in British history."<sup>1</sup> The scholar, Sir Llewellyn Woodward, in Great Britain and the War of 1914-1918, remarked that "no single act of military incompetence had such far-reaching effects on the history of the war," and a noted journalist of the time in The Uncensored Dardanelles, published in 1920, offered this opinion:

No first-class Power except Great Britain would have rushed baldheaded at the Dardanelles and Gallipoli without months of reflection and silent preparation by a highly trained general staff, composed of the best brains of the army. . . . Never have I known such a collection of unsuitable people to whom to entrust a great campaign, the lives of their countrymen, and the safety of the Empire. Their muddles, mismanagement, and ignorance of the strategy and tactics of modern war have brought about the greatest disaster in English history.<sup>2</sup>

The list goes on *ad infinitum* with similar condemnation by scholars, military historians, political leaders, statesmen and the like, lamenting the total illogical use of military forces in such a pivotal campaign that could have saved hundreds of thousands of soldiers' and sailors' lives while shortening the war inestimably. There exists volume upon volume of literature documenting the tragic Dardanelles campaign with some of the most bitter criticism of the period's political and military leaders. The purpose of this paper is not to chronicle the detailed causes

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1. B.H. Liddell Hart, A History of the First World War (Boston: Cassell, 1964), p. 288.

2. Sir Llewellyn Woodward and Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett quoted in John Laffin, Damn the Dardanelles! The Story of Gallipoli (London: Osprey, 1980), p. 196.

of the failed Dardanelles campaign and attach scapegoats to each mistake, but to analyze the causes from the operational commander's perspective.

Justification. Despite the volumes of expert analyses of the Dardanelles with accompanying lengthy lists of lessons learned, similar errors were repeated in the next World War, inexplicably by some of the very same leaders, and have continued to resurface in the Korean War, Viet Nam and other regional conflicts and crises. The recent aborted mission in Somalia lends credence to the fact that not all lessons have been learned. Even after ten Commissioners appointed by the King of England in 1916 went through excruciating detail to deal with the facts connected with the origin and inception of the Dardanelles campaign, the conclusions from the final report seemed to hold little weight in view of continued mismanagement throughout the remainder of World War I.<sup>3</sup> Why? Is it still possible to make these and similar mistakes in future operations? What can the operational commander do in the application of operational art at the operational level to prevent or at least diffuse the transgressions of leaders at the strategic level?

This paper will attempt to answer these questions in the context of an operation which we are most likely to face in the future. The overwhelming success enjoyed during the 1991 Gulf War may be an aberration when one considers the present situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Korea, Haiti and other hot spots throughout the world where we have national interests.

Scope. The period this paper will focus on will be 4 August 1914 to 23 March 1915, from the outbreak of World War I until the date generally associated with when it was decided to abandon the idea of a purely naval attack (without Army assistance) on the Dardanelles. As such, the Gallipoli portion--the ground phase of

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3. Great Britain Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement (London: 1917), pp. 41-43.

the Dardanelles campaign--will only be mentioned briefly in the debate over single Service versus a joint operation to achieve the ultimate objectives. The ground phase has been covered much more extensively than the naval phase primarily due to the inordinate loss of soldiers' lives and also in the context of amphibious operations. Many have claimed that the lessons learned from the Gallipoli operation were the basis for the U. S. military's adaptation of amphibious doctrine, tactics, techniques and procedures.<sup>4</sup>

A detailed sequence of events leading up to the start of the Dardanelles campaign will not be given in the interest of brevity. Rather, the objectives of the campaign followed by the ways and means to achieve these objectives should suffice to educate the reader, if needed. Following the brief background of the campaign, the most likely causal factors of the failed naval operation will be analyzed from the operational commander's perspective. Preceding the conclusions will be the significance of the lessons learned from the past applied to a hypothetical military operation in the future.

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<sup>4</sup>. Cortez D. Stephens, "Gallipoli--What Went Right?" Marine Corps Gazette, October 1993, p. 72.

## CHAPTER II

### OPERATIONAL PLANNING AND EXECUTION

The End: The Objective of the Dardanelles. The primary objective of the campaign was to take the city of Constantinople on the Bosphorus strait. Even today, the only way out of the Black Sea and into the Mediterranean is through the 19 mile long Bosphorus bottleneck, into the Sea of Marmara and through another bottleneck, the 38 mile long Dardanelles channel, into the Aegean Sea. The Gallipoli peninsula forms the western shore of the Dardanelles and at its narrowest point, appropriately named, "The Narrows," the channel is a mere 1,400 yards wide. At the outbreak of World War I, Turkey, owning the Gallipoli peninsula, held the key to one of the most critical sea lines of communication in the world. Until the end of 1914, over 90 percent of Russia's grain and half its exports had passed through the Dardanelles.<sup>5</sup> When Russia declared war on Turkey, with Britain and France following suit, after Turkish fleet attacks on Russian Black Sea ports, Russia was cut off from all trade with her Allies, including badly needed military supplies.

The toppling of Constantinople, the primary strategic domino (or objective) would hopefully cause the remaining strategic and operational dominos to tumble leading to ultimate victory for the triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia). Forcibly enter the Dardanelles, through the Sea of Marmara, bombard the Turkish city of Constantinople on the Bosphorus, and the dominos (/ \) would fall: / \ Turkey drops out of the war / \ Russia is relieved of pressure in the Caucasus to concentrate on the Eastern Front / \ Germany is demoralized by having enemies in its rear operating area / \ Greece and Italy, perhaps Bulgaria and Rumania, are

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5. William Manchester, The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory: 1874-1932 (New York: Dell, 1983), p. 512.



drawn in on the side of Britain and France/\ Austria has her hands full fighting the Balkan states/\ Turkish armies in Arabia, with their communications cut, will face certain defeat/\ and all will alleviate pressure on the Western Front where the war will be won.

To Britain and France, this idea seemed to be the best solution to the stalemated war of attrition on the Western Front which had already taken nearly one million allied lives by the end of 1914, only four months into the start of the war. Russia was content to have any plan that would take the pressure off in the Caucasus. Much debate ensued prior to the selection of this objective with little consideration given to the ways and means to achieve it.

The Ways. The Dardanelles was defended by Turkish fortifications and mobile howitzers along the shores of the Gallipoli peninsula in addition to mines laid throughout the channel itself. The plan to take the Dardanelles was devised primarily by the on scene British commander of the Mediterranean Fleet, Vice Admiral Carden, consisting of systematic bombardment followed by minesweeping in four distinct phases: 1) destruction of defenses at the entrance to the channel, 2) action inside the channel, clearing the channel with minesweepers up to the Narrows, 3) destruction of the defenses at the Narrows and 4) sweeping a clear channel through the minefield followed by a reduction of the forts further up, then advance into the Sea of Marmara and onward to Constantinople. It was estimated to take approximately 30 days to execute these operations.<sup>6</sup> Originally conceived in early January 1915, the plan evolved through several iterations. At first it was going to be purely naval with only a small contingent of ground troops (Royal Marines) to demolish the forts that were deactivated by ship bombardment. The continual debate as to whether backup ground forces should be deployed to the area was decided just prior to the first battle of the campaign

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6. Great Britain Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement (London: 1917), pp. 17-18.

when it was determined to be a purely naval operation due to the desperate need of all ground forces at the Western Front. In the event that the naval operation was unsuccessful, the attack could be canceled and all forces easily withdrawn since no ground forces were committed.

The Means. Since no Army ground forces were to be used, Carden requested and received an armada of close to 46 ships consisting of battleships, heavy and light cruisers, destroyers, minesweepers and nearly 20 additional support vessels. This combined British and French naval force was considered to be the most formidable ever seen in the Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup> Carden intended to overwhelm the Turkish forts with his longer range battleship guns, then with the minesweepers leading the way, close in to finish them off one by one with the shorter range ships and steadfastly proceed up the Dardanelles in this manner to the Sea of Marmara. Prior to this evolution, he would create a diversion to confuse the Turks by shelling both coasts of the Gallipoli peninsula.

The Risks. The risks were few when considered with the great political and military advantages to be gained if the operation were to be successful. Mines were the most feared threat to the allied Fleet with the fortifications and mobile howitzers posing a secondary but much less imposing threat to stop the advance of the ships. Unknowns to be dealt with once the operation commenced were the level of Turkish resupply available and the resolve of the Turkish forces to continue the fight once attacked. If the mines or any of the unknowns proved to be insurmountable, the forces could easily withdraw without the commitment of ground forces, thus minimizing losses.

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7. William Manchester, The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory: 1874-1932 (New York: Dell, 1983), p. 520.

## CHAPTER III

### FAILURES IN RELATION TO THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER

The Operational Commander. Vice Admiral Carden was the on scene commander in the Mediterranean at the start of the war with Turkey, 31 October 1914. He operated at the operational-tactical level, reporting directly to the First Sea Lord who was the U.S. equivalent to the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), although the First Sea Lord was much more involved in the operational level of planning than would be the CNO. The only warfighting Commander-in-Chief (CINC) in the British Navy was the CINC of the Navy, Admiral Jellicoe, who was in charge of the Grand Fleet in the North Sea area and had no direct dealing with the Dardanelles campaign other than being conferred with periodically on the subject of ship resources.

Carden was not the first choice of either the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Winston Churchill (the U.S. equivalent to the Secretary of the Navy), or the First Sea Lord. Churchill wanted Carden's position to be filled by Sir Arthur Limpus, a much younger and more aggressive admiral who had studied the Dardanelles for years and had once been the Chief of the Naval Mission to Turkey. His appointment was vetoed by the British Foreign Secretary in September 1914, when Turkey was still neutral, for fear that naming Limpus would provoke the Turks.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, Turkey had violated all treaties related to the Dardanelles in September and was already strongly aligned with Germany.

Carden was not the right man for the assignment. He was nearly 60 years old and prior to the outbreak of the war, had been the superintendent of the Malta shipyards. As will be seen later, he lacked the expertise and resilience necessary

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<sup>8</sup>. John Laffin, Damn the Dardanelles! The Story of Gallipoli (London: Osprey, 1980). p. 13.

to make difficult decisions in the heat of battle. He was the operational commander of this most critical operation only because diplomatic concerns overruled sound operational judgment. The only thing Carden could do to improve the situation would be to resign, which he eventually did (due to medical reasons) but, unfortunately, it was not until three days prior to the battle for the Dardanelles channel. At that late date, his resignation did more harm than good.

Political Expediency. The overriding reason for conducting the Dardanelles campaign was to appease the czar of Russia who was desperately looking for assistance to deal with the threat of the Turks in the Caucasus.<sup>9</sup> Just barely able to hold their own against the Germans at the Eastern Front prior to declaring war against Turkey, it was only a matter of time before Russia would have to surrender. The British and French could not afford to lose a key member of the triple Entente at a time when the Western Front was at a stalemate and had become purely a war of attrition. If Russia were to surrender, the Germans could concentrate solely on the Western Front and would be certain to emerge victorious. Prior to this unsettling eventuality, the British Secretary of State for War had shelved plans to begin amphibious flanking maneuvers in either the North Sea or the Mediterranean because the ground troops required to properly prosecute either one of these missions could not be spared from the Western Front. Now with the Russians pleading for help in early January 1915, the potential of a purely naval campaign in the Dardanelles seemed to be the only solution. Churchill quickly sent the following telegram to Carden to get his views on the feasibility of a naval attack in the Dardanelles:

Do you think that it is a practicable operation to force the Dardanelles by the use of ships alone?

It is assumed that older battleships would be employed, that they would be furnished with mine sweepers and that they would be

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<sup>9</sup>. Murray Peden, "Gallipoli, A Tragic Mistake in Military Strategy," National Guard, October 1988, p. 37.

preceded by colliers or other merchant vessels as sweepers and bumpers.

The importance of the results would justify severe loss. Let me know what your views are.<sup>10</sup>

Carden's subsequent replies to this important telegram in the course of less than a week implied that a naval operation could be accomplished and that it would take a month to carry out the four phases that he outlined.<sup>11</sup> In little more than two weeks from the date of Carden's reply, it was decided to launch the naval campaign. Based on the assessment of an operational commander of questionable operational expertise with apparently minimal staffing, the politicians initiated what was later arguably considered to be the most poorly planned military operation in history. Russia's impending demise precluded any semblance of logical planning prior to the fateful decision.

Planning: Naval vs. Joint. The preceding section on Political Expediency may imply that little thought was given to making the Dardanelles a joint Army-Navy expedition when, in actuality, this subject was debated quite extensively. As early as November 1914, immediately after Turkey entered the war and the battle on the Western Front was mercilessly bogged down, Churchill analyzed the possibility of flanking maneuvers in either the north or south, both options requiring the use of ground troops to ensure success. Due to the massive requirements of ground forces to hold at the Western Front in France and a subsidiary campaign being waged in Egypt, purportedly no reserves were available to dedicate to a new theater of war. The theater commanders in France and Egypt were unwilling to contribute any of their forces to another operation and the strong opposition of the British Secretary of State for War to committing valuable ground forces made the possibility of beginning another land campaign

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10. Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Scribner, 1923), v. 2 (1915), p. 97.

11. Great Britain Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement (London: 1917), p. 18.

anywhere, no matter how strategically significant, virtually impossible.

Churchill was not alone in his analysis of the Dardanelles which would require joint forces. It was generally agreed upon at all levels of planning that no matter how successful ships might be at silencing shore fortifications on the Gallipoli peninsula while the Fleet forced its way through the channel, the Army would be required eventually to maintain security of the shoreline from being reinforced by the Turks.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the British War Council (similar to the U.S. National Command Authority) apparently realized the error of their ways just prior to the Navy beginning phase one of the attack. They decided to send troops to the island of Lemnos nearby the Dardanelles to assist in securing Gallipoli once the ships were in the channel. As we shall see later, final commitment of the ground forces was delayed only because of petty politics between the two most powerful personalities on the War Council.

Since the War Council vacillated so much between joint versus Navy only, it can be surmised that had Carden, as the operational commander, thoroughly staffed the problem prior to responding to Churchill's telegram, his answer would have been different. Joint was the only way to go in order to ensure success. As will be seen later in the section on Military Leadership, Carden did not take to heart Churchill's comment, "The importance of the results would justify severe loss." There is no evidence whatsoever to indicate that the Carden performed even a cursory risk analysis or an analysis of enemy capabilities prior to providing his "Commander's Estimate." Crisis action planning, as we know it today, did not exist at any level in the British political-military system.

**Political Leadership.** The political leaders of this time were not quite as inept as historians have made them out to be. The system within which they had to

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<sup>12</sup>. Great Britain Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement (London: 1917), pp. 13, 14.

work and the strong willed personalities of those ultimately making the decisions were greatly to blame. Prior to the outbreak of the First World War and until the end of November 1914, the British Cabinet, consisting of 22 civilians, was responsible for the conduct of military operations.<sup>13</sup> The Cabinet was assisted by the Committee of Imperial Defense, but the Cabinet made the final decisions. Since the Committee of Imperial Defense concerned itself primarily with peace requirements, it was necessary to reorganize for the purpose of streamlining the decision making process after the start of the war. The War Council was formed consisting of the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (who handled finances), the Secretaries of State for War, Foreign Affairs and India, and the First Lord of the Admiralty. Although not considered formal members of the War Council, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the First Sea Lord were invited to provide expert military advice. The single most important change in this organization was that the War Council did not need Cabinet approval in making decisions concerning military operations.<sup>14</sup>

In effect, after the formation of the War Council, all the important decisions made with respect to military matters emanated from a triumvirate of political leaders: The Right Honorable Sir Henry Asquith, the Prime Minister; Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War; and Sir Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty. Kitchener was a career military man whereas Churchill had little military experience, coming from an aristocratic family and moved into politics at a very early age. At the start of the war, Churchill was only 40 years old and had to deal with military commanders who were oftentimes twenty to thirty years his senior. His First Sea Lord was in his seventies and it has already been noted that Carden was approaching 60. Both Kitchener and Churchill were imposing figures with little tolerance for the opinions of others, right or wrong, and

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13. Great Britain Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement (London: 1917), p. 5.

14. Ibid., pp. 4-6.

those who worked for them were easily intimidated. Asquith was not the most domineering of Prime Ministers and left most of the important decisions to his Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener. Kitchener was the soul mouthpiece of the War Office. His General Staff was weak, composed of officers on the retired list while all the top notch officers were sent to the Western Front. He was all powerful, imperturbable, of immense authority whose decisions were always final. He was heavily burdened by trying to single-handedly take on all the responsibilities of the War Office and as a result, according to Churchill, his decisions were based on impressions and he had no well thought out doctrine.<sup>15</sup>

To say that Kitchener and Churchill did not get along well would be an understatement. Churchill's relentless drive to get his way at all costs was perceived by Kitchener as an attempt to gain political favor on the road to someday becoming Prime Minister and stood in the way of Churchill getting from Kitchener what was needed for the Navy to fight the war. The greatest single example of the petty divisiveness between these two powerful leaders which could be directly related to the failed Dardanelles campaign was Kitchener's withdrawal of badly needed ground forces just prior to the first phase of the campaign. Churchill at one time had made an informal offering of Admiralty troops and equipment to the commander of the British Expeditionary Force in France. When Kitchener found out about the offer without being consulted by Churchill, he was so incensed that he withheld the troops that were going to be sent to Lemnos as backup to the Navy in the Dardanelles. He did this without informing Churchill, apparently in reprisal against Churchill without any consideration of the devastating impact it might have on the outcome of the critical operation about to begin.<sup>16</sup> Churchill went to Asquith for help, but Kitchener was so intimidating

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15. Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis* (New York: Scribner, 1923), v. 2 (1915), p. 174.

16. William Manchester, *The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory: 1874-1932* (New York: Dell, 1983), pp. 529-531.



that not even the Prime Minister would dare to step in.

With friends like these, who needs enemies? Although it is doubtful a similar situation could exist within the present U.S. structure of the highest body of decision makers, it is not unlikely that personality conflicts between political leaders may sometimes stand in the way of sound and expeditious decisions. Because Kitchener and Churchill were so intimidating to those they worked with most closely, the politicians failed to press them for the objectives, details and plans, the ends and means of the Dardanelles campaign. The operational commander can not do much to change the personalities of the politicians. However, he can do much to alleviate their shortcomings through clear and concise articulation of his concept of operations, to include the ends, ways and means and solid risk analysis. Carden did none of this.

Military Leadership. It has been said that the ultimate failure of the Dardanelles campaign rested on the "authorities at home."<sup>17</sup> Although the politicians bore a portion of the blame, the Dardanelles campaign could still have been successful but for the simple fact that the military leaders lacked the intestinal fortitude to stick with a plan (even though the plan was not well conceived) and press the attack. Poor military leadership leading to the demise of the Dardanelles can be traced to three key individuals: Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher, the First Sea Lord; Vice Admiral Carden, operational commander at the Dardanelles; and his successor, Vice Admiral de Robeck.

Although influenced heavily by Churchill, technically, the Fleet could not be ordered to do anything without Fisher first being consulted. "Only the First Sea Lord can order the ships to steam and the guns to fire."<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, Fisher was extremely reluctant to issue orders and in most cases, after conferring with

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17. H. W. Nevins, The Dardanelles Campaign (London: Nisbet, 1918), p. 207.

18. Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Scribner, 1923), v. 2 (1915), p. 166.

Churchill, Churchill was the one to initiate action in the Fleet. After Carden's advocacy of a Navy only campaign, Churchill and Fisher debated the pros and cons with Fisher initially favoring a joint operation. Churchill first presented the Dardanelles war plan to the War Council on 13 January 1915, and even though Fisher was not in total agreement, he voiced no opinion. In fact, he was totally silent. The Navy "experts" were never asked for their opinions so Fisher did not volunteer his views. Even though Fisher disagreed, he "loyally" kept his mouth shut. As a result, the War Council assumed silence implied agreement. Fisher had another opportunity to voice his opinion to the War Council, but instead, exhibited the childish behavior of briefly walking out of the meeting. Kitchener had to persuade him to come back, but Fisher still chose to remain silent saying later that, "silence or resignation was the right course."<sup>19</sup> As an indication of Fisher's inability to stand up to one's convictions, by the end of the meeting, Kitchener and Churchill had convinced him that the Dardanelles naval campaign was the way to go and he exclaimed, "When I finally decided to go in, I went the whole hog, *totus porcus*."<sup>20</sup>

It was unfortunate that Fisher, the number one officer in the Navy, did not resign, for his attitude of negativism spread throughout the ranks of his naval commanders. Ironically, some of his quotations live on today, painting an unrealistic picture of one of the most inept military leaders of the war: "Let everyone be optimistic and shoot the pessimists."<sup>21</sup> "The essence of war is violence; moderation in war is imbecility."<sup>22</sup> His true character was exemplified by the following quote as a way of saying, "I told you so!" to Churchill when the

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19. Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Scribner, 1923), v. 2 (1915), p. 165.

20. Ibid.

21. William Manchester, The Last Lion. Winston Spencer Churchill. Visions of Glory, 1874-1932 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 484.

22. Sandy Woodward, One Hundred Days. The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1992), p. 256.

Dardanelles campaign was not going so well, even though he was in it *totus porcus*:

You are just simply eaten up with the Dardanelles and cannot think of anything else! Damn the Dardanelles! They will be our grave.<sup>23</sup>

It was unfortunate that Fisher did not have the determination of an Admiral Farragut to say, "Damn the torpedoes [or more appropriately, the mines], full speed ahead!"

The situation with the commander of the Dardanelles campaign and his successor was not much better. Despite resounding success of the campaign's first phase, the shelling of the outer forts, Carden buckled under the pressure from Churchill to commence the second phase which would start the transit of the Dardanelles channel. Even after further assurances from the Admiralty that the results to be gained from the operation would justify loss of ships and men, Carden was mysteriously placed on the sick list one day after sending a telegram to Churchill agreeing that the operation should commence immediately. The exact diagnosis of Carden's illness was not known, although all signs indicated a nervous breakdown. Suddenly Carden's Chief of Staff, de Robeck, was placed in command of an operation of unlimited importance to commence in only three days. De Robeck wired Churchill indicating agreement with Carden's plan and commenced the attack on 18 March 1915.<sup>24</sup>

The second phase was proceeding according to plan until three battleships were put out of action due to hits in a minefield that had been reseeded two days prior. In the confusion that ensued, the "fog of war," de Robeck ordered the retreat of his forces and never did resume the attack despite incessant prodding from Churchill. De Robeck conferred with the ground force commander who had recently arrived in theater awaiting the arrival of the troops that Kitchener had

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23. Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Scribner, 1923), v. 2 (1915), p. 313.

24. Great Britain Dardanelles Commission, First Report & Supplement (London: 1917), p. 36.

canceled and then laid back on again. The two commanders decided that the operation would now have a better chance of success as a joint campaign, even though the troops would not be available for another four weeks, and forwarded their recommendation to London. There was a split in feeling that the attack should be pressed immediately or go joint, with the Prime Minister and Churchill in favor of persevering while Kitchener and Fisher favored a joint attack (amphibious landing on Gallipoli). Once again, the Prime Minister would not intervene so the Secretary of State for War and the First Sea Lord prevailed. On 23 March 1915, the Navy only operation was canceled. Churchill lamented:

Henceforward the defenses of the Dardanelles were to be reinforced by an insurmountable barrier . . . . The "No" principle had become established in men's minds, and nothing could ever eradicate it. Never again could I marshal the Admiralty War Group and the War Council in favor of resolute action. Never again could I move the First Sea Lord.<sup>25</sup>

The operational commander failed to maintain the initiative even though the losses were minor compared to the potential gains had the Dardanelles been pressed. That he failed to maintain the initiative in favor of an amphibious operation that could not commence for at least four weeks with no chance for a surprise amphibious landing was unconscionable. The Gallipoli operation failed miserably for many of the same reasons as the Dardanelles fiasco, costing the lives of over a quarter million gallant soldiers. The Turkish defenses were nearly crushed on 18 March. After the war, a German Aide de Camp to the Minister of Marine at Berlin had this to say about the state of affairs in Turkey:

I have no doubt whatever that Turkey would have made peace. There would have been a revolution. The appearance of ships before Constantinople would have been sufficient. Constantinople is Turkey. There were no troops to speak of in Constantinople.<sup>26</sup>

The dominos were so close to falling.

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25. Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Scribner, 1923), v. 2 (1915), p. 258.

26. Ibid., p. 271.

## CHAPTER IV

### RELEVANCE TO FUTURE OPERATIONS

**Strategic Chokepoints.** If a ship were to sail westward from the Dardanelles via the shortest possible route around the world, it would travel through three straits and two canals before arriving back in the Mediterranean: The Strait of Gibraltar, the Panama Canal, the Strait of Malacca, the Bab El Mandeb and the Suez Canal. The closure of any one of these chokepoints would significantly add to the number of days required to make the long journey. As such, these critical waterways are of immense strategic importance both militarily and economically. Any attempt at, or even the mere threat of, closing down their access would be met with much resistance, particularly from the U.S.

A strait that is not on this direct global transit lane, but is of much more strategic importance (due to the free flow of oil) than those chokepoints already mentioned, is the Strait of Hormuz (SOH). Of all the worldwide chokepoints, the SOH is most likely to play a part in a future conflict between the U.S. and an Arabian Gulf country. Recently, General Hoar, Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command, claimed that a future confrontation of some sort is inevitable between the U.S. and Iran. He went on to say that Iran's recently acquired capability to clandestinely mine the SOH poses a challenging problem to the operational commander in that Area of Responsibility (AOR).<sup>27</sup> It is not impossible to imagine a most demanding scenario that would require the U.S. military to force their way in or out (most likely out) of the Gulf through the SOH and then ensure the continued safe passage of traffic. What lessons are to be learned from the Dardanelles campaign that would be helpful to the operational commander in this scenario?

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph P. Hoar, General, USMC, Lecture, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 4 May 1994.

Lessons To Be Learned. The operation will undoubtedly be joint and, ultimately, most likely combined. Pick a Joint Task Force Commander with the most experience in the AOR. He must be intimately familiar with the region in order to most effectively employ any or all flexible deterrent options. Seniority of a military leader does not always equate to the best capability to cope with the friction or fog of war. As it was with Carden in the Dardanelles, choosing a theater commander based solely on seniority, excluding capabilities, is intolerable.

Avoid at all costs being driven by political expediency from the National Command Authority on down. The operational commander may have to risk a future promotion by standing up to the brass in Washington if being pressured to prosecute an ill-advised plan. The promotion will become a demotion anyway if the ill-advised plan fails. The operational commander must be comfortable with the politics involved. Do not be intimidated. He must force the political objectives to be translated into a clear strategical analysis of the problem to ensure proper appreciation of the tactical requirements. Only then can the military means available be balanced with the political end in view.

If a plan for this scenario is nonexistent, then start one immediately. Formulate the concept of operations with inputs at all levels. Obtain inputs from the strategic commander all the way down to the unit tactical commander. There will be no time for second guessing during the campaign. Ensure everyone is in agreement with the plan, *totus porcus*, prior to the start including the detailed time line for execution. After a solid plan is conceived, practice, practice, practice. The Iran/SOH scenario has taken a back seat to Iraq for far too long. If and when the scenario develops, pull the operational plan off the shelf and fine tune with crisis action planning.

Finally a positive attitude at all levels must be created. If negativism is prevalent, inevitably it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Take the initiative

and maintain it. The thought of a Carrier Battle Group with or without an Amphibious Ready Group trapped within the confines of the Arabian Gulf with an operational commander unwilling to persevere in the face of adversity is a frightening prospect. Forget Fisher, Carden and de Robeck. Remember Nelson, Farragut and Patton. Risks may have to be taken. The importance of a persuasive Commander's Estimate with methodical risk analysis becomes even more important. A well-articulated plan in advance will make the task of risk taking more supportable in a society unwilling to take risks with lives at stake. Some risks will ultimately save lives. Had de Robeck accepted risk and persevered on 18 March 1915, 247 thousand lives could have been saved.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

There are no new lessons to be learned from the Dardanelles campaign, only lessons to be relearned:

Information, plans, preparation, adequate force, surprise, joint action, prompt attack, and energetic follow up of advantages gained, might they not have culminated in success?

At least they would have afforded the best chance, and in war we do not deal in certainties.<sup>28</sup>

The politicians were too enamored with the political gains to be won with a successful attack at the Dardanelles and the possibility of a quick end to a stalemated war simply by the appearance of British and French ships off the shores of Constantinople. Far too little thought was ever given to the ways and means that would be required to translate political aims into military action. Based on the snap judgment of the operational commander, the politicians rejected any previous consideration to a joint versus a Navy only attack. The complex problem of forcing the Dardanelles against land based fortifications should have been studied by a joint staff before committing valuable resources in a potentially futile effort. Before the final decision was made, the War Council should have received detailed staff estimates of resources required for different courses of action and their associated risks. Political expediency precluded any affinity to deliberate planning or crisis action planning as we know it today. Political expediency was the bigger foe to the operational commander than the enemy itself.

The most senior British naval officer, Admiral Fisher, the First Sea Lord, was certainly a main contributor to the disastrous defeat at the Dardanelles by

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<sup>28</sup>. Walter S. Anderson, "The Strategy of the Dardanelles Campaign," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, July 1923, p. 1140.



remaining silent at critical War Council meetings rather than voicing his opinions. This "Service etiquette" seemed to permeate throughout the Fleet and contribute toward a pessimistic attitude. His silence has been attributed to, "the product of a pseudo-disciplinary naval training and environment which did not differentiate between obedience to orders, which is right, and thinking as ordered, which is wrong."<sup>29</sup> Military leaders refusing to speak their minds can only lead to disastrous results in any military operation.

Finally, the operational commander. Vice Admiral Carden was not the best man for the job which was known from the start. He folded under the pressure brought on by political expediency and the fear of having to prosecute an ill-conceived plan upon which rested the outcome of the remainder of the war. His successor was placed in a difficult position, assuming command just three days prior to the critical phase of the operation. Ironically, had he pressed the attack after absorbing some initial losses, indications are that he may have been successful. No one will ever know for sure. One thing is known for sure. He might have saved over 247,000 lives which was the total when the Gallipoli amphibious landing ended in abysmal failure.

What are the lessons to be relearned by the operational commander?

- Do not succumb to political expediency. Insist that the political objectives be translated into clear strategy with the tactical requirements in mind. The military means can then be balanced with the political end in view. The key to avoiding political pressure is in the next step, the plan.
- Plan early for every possible contingency with inputs from the entire chain of command, including the unit tactical commanders. The plan must contain a time line which will drive the operational execution rather

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<sup>29</sup> K.G.B. Dewar, "The Dardanelles Campaign, Part III," Naval Review, October 1957, p.401.

than politics driving the operational commander. Practice is the key to success. All players must be in agreement on the concept of operations before the campaign begins.

- A thoroughly prepared plan with inputs at all levels should instill a positive attitude. Negativism can not be allowed.
- Once the initiative is gained, it must be pressed. Risks are inevitable and should be identified in the planning process. Risk taking has historically prevented additional losses. Avoidance of risk has historically led to failure.

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